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ART. II. — *Sketches of English Literature ; with Considerations on the Spirit of the Times, Men, and Revolutions.*

By the Viscount de CHATEAUBRIAND. 2 vols. 8vo. London. 1836.

THERE are few topics of greater attraction, or, when properly treated, of higher importance, than literary history. For what is it, but a faithful register of the successive steps, by which a nation has advanced in the career of civilization? Civil history records the crimes and the follies, the enterprises, discoveries, and triumphs, it may be, of humanity. But to what do all these tend, or of what moment are they, in the eye of the philosopher, except as they accelerate or retard the march of civilization? The history of literature is the history of the human mind. It is, as compared with other histories, the intellectual as distinguished from the material, — the informing spirit, as compared with the outward and visible.

When such a view of the mental progress of a people is combined with individual biography, we have all the materials for the deepest and most varied interest. The life of the man of letters is not always circumscribed by the walls of a cloister; and was not, even in those days when the cloister was the familiar abode of science. The history of Dante and of Petrarch is the best commentary on that of their age. In later times, the man of letters has taken part in all the principal concerns of public and social life. But, even when the story is to derive its interest from his own personal character, what a store of entertainment is supplied by the eccentricities of genius, the joys and sorrows, not visible to vulgar eyes, but which agitate his finer sensibilities, as powerfully as the greatest shocks of worldly fortune would a hardier and less visionary temper. What deeper interest can romance afford, than is to be gathered from the melancholy story of Petrarch, Tasso, Alfieri, Rousseau, Byron, Burns, and a crowd of familiar names, whose genius seems to have been given them only to sharpen their sensibility to suffering? What matter, if their sufferings were, for the most part, of the imagination? They were not the less real to *them*. They lived in a world of imagination, and by the gift of genius, unfortunate to its proprietor, have known how,

in the language of one of the most unfortunate, "to make madness beautiful" in the eyes of others.

But, notwithstanding the interest and importance of literary history, it has hitherto received but little attention from English writers. No complete survey of the achievements of our native tongue has been yet produced, or even attempted. The earlier periods of the poetical development of the nation have been well illustrated by various antiquaries. Warton has brought the history of poetry down to the season of its first vigorous expansion, — the age of Elizabeth. But he did not penetrate beyond the magnificent vestibule of the temple. Dr. Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" have done much to supply the deficiency in this department. But much more remains to be done, to afford the student any thing like a complete view of the progress of poetry in England. Johnson's work, as every one knows, is conducted on the most capricious and irregular plan. The biographies were dictated by the choice of the bookseller. Some of the most memorable names in British literature are omitted, to make way for a host of minor luminaries, whose dim radiance, unassisted by the magnifying lens of the Doctor, would never have penetrated to posterity. The same irregularity is visible in the proportion he has assigned to each of his subjects; the principal figures, or what should have been such, being often thrown into the background, to make room for some subordinate personage, whose story was thought to have more interest.

Besides these defects of plan, the critic was certainly deficient in sensibility to the more delicate, the minor beauties of poetic sentiment. He analyzes verse in the cold-blooded spirit of a chemist, until all the aroma, which constituted its principal charm, escapes in the decomposition. By this kind of process, some of the finest fancies of the Muse, the lofty dithyrambics of Gray, the ethereal effusions of Collins, and of Milton too, are rendered sufficiently vapid. In this sort of criticism, all the effect, that relies on *impressions*, goes for nothing. Ideas are alone taken into the account; and all is weighed in the same hard, matter-of-fact scales of common sense, like so much solid prose. What a sorry figure would Byron's Muse make, subjected to such an ordeal! The Doctor's taste in composition, to judge from his own style, was not of the highest order. It was a style,

indeed, of extraordinary power, suited to the expression of his original thinking, bold, vigorous, and glowing, with all the lustre of pointed antithesis. But the brilliancy is cold, and the ornaments are much too florid and overcharged for a graceful effect. When to these minor blemishes we add the graver one of an obliquity of judgment, produced by inveterate political and religious prejudice, which has thrown a shadow over some of the brightest characters subjected to his pencil, we have summed up a fair amount of critical deficiencies. With all this, there is no one of the works of this great and good man, in which he has displayed more of the strength of his mighty intellect, shown a more pure and masculine morality, more sound principles of criticism, in the abstract, more acute delineation of character, and more gorgeous splendor of diction. His defects, however, such as they are, must prevent his maintaining, with posterity, that undisputed dictatorship in criticism, which was conceded to him in his own day. We must do justice to his errors, as well as to his excellences, in order that we may do justice to the characters which have come under his censure. And we must admit, that his work, however admirable as a gallery of splendid portraits, is inadequate to convey any thing like a complete or impartial view of English poetry.

The English have made but slender contributions to the history of foreign literatures. The most important, probably, are Roscoe's works, in which literary criticism, though but a subordinate feature, is the most valuable part of the composition. As to any thing like a general survey of this department, they are wholly deficient. The deficiency, indeed, is likely to be supplied, to a certain extent, by the work of Mr. Hallam, now in progress of publication; the first volume of which,—the only one which has yet issued from the press,—gives evidence of the same curious erudition, acuteness, honest impartiality, and energy of diction, which distinguish the other writings of this eminent scholar. But the extent of his work, limited to four volumes, precludes any thing more than a survey of the most prominent features of the vast subject he has undertaken.

The Continental nations, under serious discouragements, too, have been much more active than the British, in this field. The Spaniards can boast a general history of letters, extending to more than twenty volumes in length, and com-

piled with sufficient impartiality. The Italians have several such. Yet these are the lands of the Inquisition ; where reason is hoodwinked, and the honest utterance of opinion has been recompensed by persecution, exile, and the stake. How can such a people estimate the character of compositions, which, produced under happier institutions, are instinct with the spirit of freedom ? How can they make allowance for the manifold eccentricities of a literature, where thought is allowed to expatiate in all the independence of individual caprice ? How can they possibly, trained to pay such nice deference to outward finish and mere verbal elegance, have any sympathy with the rough and homely beauties, which emanate from the people, and are addressed to the people ?

The French, nurtured under freer forms of government, have contrived to come under a system of literary laws, scarcely less severe. Their first great dramatic production gave rise to a scheme of critical legislation, which has continued, ever since, to press on the genius of the nation, in all the higher walks of poetic art. Amidst all the mutations of state, the tone of criticism has remained essentially the same, to the present century, when, indeed, the boiling passions and higher excitements of a revolutionary age, have made the classic models, on which their literature was cast, appear somewhat too frigid ; and a warmer coloring has been sought by an infusion of English sentiment. But this mixture, or rather confusion of styles, neither French nor English, seems to rest on no settled principles, and is, probably, too alien to the genius of the people to continue permanent.

The French, forming themselves early on a foreign and antique model, were necessarily driven to rules, as a substitute for those natural promptings, which have directed the course of other modern nations in the career of letters. Such rules, of course, while assimilating them to antiquity, drew them aside from sympathy with their own contemporaries. How can they, thus formed on an artificial system, enter into the spirit of other literatures, so uncongenial with their own ?

That the French continued subject to such a system, with little change, to the present age, is evinced by the example of Voltaire ; a writer, whose lawless ridicule,

“ like the wind,

“ Blew where it listed, laying all things prone ; ”

but whose revolutionary spirit made no serious changes in the principles of the national criticism. Indeed, his commentaries on Corneille furnish evidence of a willingness to contract still closer the range of the poet, and to define more accurately the laws by which his movements were to be controlled. Voltaire's history affords an evidence of the truth of the Horatian maxim, "*Naturam expellas,*" &c. In his younger days he passed some time, as is well known, in England; and contracted there a certain relish for the strange models which came under his observation. On his return, he made many attempts to introduce the foreign school, with which he had become acquainted, to his own countrymen. His vanity was gratified by detecting the latent beauties of his barbarian neighbours, and by being the first to point them out to his countrymen. It associated him with names venerated on the other side of the Channel, and, at home, transferred a part of their glory to himself. Indeed, he was not backward in transferring as much as he could of it, by borrowing on his own account, where he could venture, *manibus plenis*, and with very little acknowledgment. The French, at length, became so far reconciled to the monstrosities of their neighbours, that a regular translation of Shakspeare, the lord of the British Pandemonium, was executed by Letourneur, a *littérateur* of no great merit; but the work was well received. Voltaire, the veteran, in his solitude of Ferney, was roused by the applause bestowed on the English poet in his Parisian costume, to a sense of his own imprudence. He saw, in imagination, the altars which had been raised to him, as well as to the other master-spirits of the national drama, in a fair way to be overturned, in order to make room for an idol of his own importation. "Have you seen," he writes, speaking of Letourneur's version, "his abominable trash? Will you endure the affront put upon France by it? There are no epithets bad enough, nor fool's-caps, nor pillories enough, in all France, for such a scoundrel. The blood tingles in my old veins in speaking of him. What is the most dreadful part of the affair is, the monster has his party in France; and, to add to my shame and consternation, it was I who first sounded the praises of *this Shakspeare*; I, who first showed the pearls, picked here and there, from his overgrown dunghheap. Little did I anticipate, that I was helping to trample under

foot, at some future day, the laurels of Racine and Corneille, to adorn the brows of a barbarous player, — this drunkard of a Shakspeare.” Not content with this expectoration of his bile, the old poet transmitted a formal letter of remonstrance to D’Alembert, which was read publicly, as designed, at a regular *séance* of the Academy. The document, after expatiating, at length, on the blunders, vulgarities, and indecencies of the English bard, concludes with this appeal to the critical body he was addressing. “Paint to yourselves, Gentlemen, Louis the Fourteenth in his gallery at Versailles, surrounded by his brilliant court : — a tatterdemalion advances, covered with rags, and proposes to the assembly to abandon the tragedies of Racine for a mountebank, full of grimaces, with nothing but a lucky hit, now and then, to redeem them.”

At a later period, Ducis, the successor of Voltaire, if we remember right, in the Academy, a writer of far superior merit to Letourneur, did the British bard into much better French than his predecessor ; though Ducis, as he takes care to acquaint us, “did his best to efface those startling impressions of horror, which would have damned his author in the polished theatres of Paris” ! Voltaire need not have taken the affair so much at heart. Shakspeare, reduced within the compass, as much as possible, of the rules, with all his eccentricities and peculiarities, — all that made him English, in fact, — smoothed away, may be tolerated, and to a certain extent countenanced, in the “polished theatres of Paris.” But this is not

“ Shakspeare, *Nature’s* child,  
Warbling his native wood-notes wild.”

The Germans present just the antipodes of their French neighbours. Coming late on the arena of modern literature, they would seem to be particularly qualified for excelling in criticism by the variety of styles and models for their study, supplied by other nations. They have accordingly done wonders in this department, and have extended their critical wand over the remotest regions, dispelling the mists of old prejudice, and throwing the light of learning on what before was dark and inexplicable. They certainly are entitled to the credit of a singularly cosmopolitan power of divesting themselves of local and national prejudice. No nation has done so much to lay the foundations of that reconciling spirit

of criticism, which, instead of condemning a difference of taste in different nations as a departure from it, seeks to explain such discrepancies by the peculiar circumstances of the nation, and thus from the elements of discord, as it were, to build up a universal and harmonious system. The exclusive and unfavorable views, entertained by some of their later critics, respecting the French literature, indeed, into which they have been urged, no doubt, by a desire to counteract the servile deference, shown to that literature by their countrymen of the preceding age, forms an important exception to their usual candor.

As general critics, however, the Germans are open to grave objections. The very circumstances of their situation, so favorable, as we have said, to the formation of a liberal criticism, have encouraged the taste for theories and for system-building, always unpropitious to truth. Whoever broaches a theory, has a hard battle to fight with conscience. If the theory cannot conform to the facts, so much the worse for the facts, as some wag has said ;—they must, at all events, conform to the theory. The Germans have put together hypotheses with the facility with which children construct card-houses ; and many of them bid fair to last as long. They show more industry in accumulating materials, than taste or discretion in their arrangement. They carry their fantastic imagination beyond the legitimate province of the Muse into the sober fields of criticism. Their philosophical systems, curiously and elaborately devised, with much ancient lore and solemn imaginings, may remind one of some of those venerable English cathedrals, where the magnificent and mysterious Gothic is blended with the clumsy Saxon. The effect, on the whole, is grand, but somewhat grotesque withal.

The Germans are too often sadly wanting in discretion ; or, in vulgar parlance, taste. They are perpetually overleaping the modesty of nature. They are possessed by a cold-blooded enthusiasm, if we may so say, —since it seems to come rather from the head than the heart, —which spurs them on, over the plainest barriers of common sense, until even the right becomes the wrong. A striking example of these defects is furnished by the dramatic critic, Schlegel ; whose “ Lectures ” are, or may be, familiar to every reader, since they have been reprinted, in the English version, in this



country. No critic, not even a native, has thrown such a flood of light on the characteristics of the sweet bard of Avon. He has made himself so intimately acquainted with the peculiar circumstances of the poet's age and country, that he has been enabled to speculate on his productions as those of a contemporary. In this way, he has furnished a key to the mysteries of his composition, has reduced what seemed anomalous to system, and has supplied Shakspeare's own countrymen with new arguments for vindicating the spontaneous suggestions of feeling on strictly philosophical principles. Not content with this important service, he, as usual, pushes his argument to extremes, vindicates notorious blemishes as necessary parts of a system, and calls on us to admire, in contradiction to the most ordinary principles of taste and common sense. Thus, for example, speaking of Shakspeare's notorious blunders in geography and chronology, he coolly tells us, "I undertake to prove, that Shakspeare's anachronisms are, for the most part, committed purposely, and after great consideration." In the same vein, speaking of the poet's villanous puns and quibbles, which, to his shame, or rather that of his age, so often bespangle, with tawdry brilliancy, the majestic robe of the Muse, he assures us, that "the poet here, probably, as everywhere else, has followed principles which will bear a strict examination." But the intrepidity of criticism never went further than in the conclusion of this same analysis, where he unhesitatingly assigns several apocryphal plays to Shakspeare, gravely informing us, that the three last, "Sir John Oldcastle," "A Yorkshire Tragedy," and "Thomas Lord Cromwell," of which the English critics speak with unreserved contempt, "are not only unquestionably Shakspeare's, but, in his judgment, rank among the best and ripest of his works"! The old bard, could he raise his head from the tomb, where none might disturb his bones, would exclaim, we imagine, "*Non tali auxilio!*"

It shows a tolerable degree of assurance in a critic, thus to dogmatize on nice questions of verbal resemblance, which have so long baffled the natives of the country, who, on such questions, obviously, can be the only competent judges. It furnishes a striking example of the want of discretion, of a regard to the *τὸ πέποιον*, noticeable in so many of the German scholars. With all these defects, however,

it cannot be denied, that they have widely extended the limits of rational criticism, and, by their copious stores of erudition, furnished the student with facilities for attaining the best points of view for a comprehensive survey of both ancient and modern literature.

The English have had advantages, on the whole, greater than those of any other people, for perfecting the science of general criticism. They have had no Academies, to bind the wing of genius to the earth by their thousand wire-drawn subtleties. No Inquisition has placed its burning seal upon the lip, and thrown its dark shadow over the recesses of the soul. They have enjoyed the inestimable privilege of thinking what they pleased, and of uttering what they thought. Their minds, trained to independence, have had no occasion to shrink from encountering any topic, and have acquired a masculine confidence, indispensable to a calm appreciation of the mighty and widely diversified productions of genius, as unfolded under the influences of as widely diversified institutions and national character. Their own literature, with chameleon-like delicacy, has reflected all the various aspects of the nation, in the successive stages of its history. The rough, romantic beauties and gorgeous pageantry of the Elizabethan age, the stern, sublime enthusiasm of the Commonwealth, the cold brilliancy of Queen Anne, and the tumultuous movements and ardent sensibilities of the present generation, — all have been reflected, as in a mirror, in the current of English literature, as it has flowed down through the lapse of ages. It is easy to understand, what advantages this cultivation of all these different styles of composition at home must give the critic, in divesting himself of narrow and local prejudice, and in appreciating the genius of foreign literatures, in each of which some one or other of these different styles has found favor. To this must be added the advantages derived from the structure of the English language itself, which, compounded of the Teutonic and the Latin, offers facilities for a comprehension of other literatures, not afforded by those languages, as the German and the Italian, for instance, almost exclusively derived from but one of them.

With all this, the English, as we have remarked, have made fewer direct contributions to general literary criticism than the Continental nations; unless, indeed, we take into the account the periodical criticism, which has covered the

whole field with a light skirmishing, very unlike any systematic plan of operations. The good effect of this *guerrilla* warfare may well be doubted. Most of these critics for the nonce (and we certainly are competent judges on this point) come to their work with little previous preparation. Their attention has been habitually called, for the most part, in other directions; and they throw off an accidental essay in the brief intervals of other occupation. Hence their views are necessarily often superficial, and sometimes contradictory, as may be seen from turning over the leaves of any journal, where literary topics are widely discussed; for, whatever consistency may be demanded in politics or religion, very free scope is offered, even in the same journal, to literary speculation. Even when the article may have been the fruit of a mind ripened by study and meditation on congenial topics, it too often exhibits only the partial view suggested by the particular and limited direction of the author's thoughts in this instance. Now, truth is not much served by this irregular process; and the general illumination, indispensable to a full and fair survey of the whole ground, can never be supplied from such scattered and capricious gleams, thrown over it at random.

Another obstacle to a right result, is founded in the very constitution of review-writing. Miscellaneous in its range of topics, and addressed to a miscellaneous class of readers, its chief reliance for success, in competition with the thousand novelties of the day, is in the temporary interest it can excite. Instead of a conscientious discussion and cautious examination of the matter in hand, we too often find an attempt to stimulate the popular appetite, by picquant sallies of wit, by caustic sarcasm, or by a pert, dashing confidence, that cuts the knot it cannot readily unloose. Then, again, the spirit of periodical criticism would seem to be little favorable to perfect impartiality. The critic, shrouded in his secret tribunal, too often demeans himself like a stern inquisitor, whose business is rather to convict than to examine. Criticism is directed to scent out blemishes, instead of beauties. "*Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*," is the bloody motto of a well-known British periodical, which, under this piratical flag, has sent a broadside into many a gallant bark, that deserved better at its hands.

When we combine with all this the spirit of patriotism,

— or what passes for such with nine tenths of the world, the spirit of national vanity, — we shall find abundant motives for a deviation from a just, impartial estimate of foreign literatures. And if we turn over the pages of the best-conducted English journals, we shall probably find ample evidence of the various causes we have enumerated. We shall find, amidst abundance of shrewd and sarcastic observation, smart skirmish of wit, and clever antithesis, a very small infusion of sober, dispassionate criticism; the criticism founded on patient study and on strictly philosophical principles; the criticism on which one can safely rely as the criterion of good taste, and which, however tame it may appear to the jaded appetite of the literary lounge, is the only one that will attract the eye of posterity.

The work, named at the head of our article, will, we suspect, notwithstanding the author's brilliant reputation, never meet this same eye of posterity. Though purporting to be, in its main design, an Essay on English Literature, it is, in fact, a multifarious compound of as many ingredients as entered into the witches' caldron; to say nothing of a gallery of portraits of dead and living, among the latter of whom M. de Chateaubriand himself is not the least conspicuous. "I have treated of every thing," he says, truly enough, in his preface, "the Present, the Past, the Future." The parts are put together in the most grotesque and disorderly manner, with some striking coincidences, occasionally, of characters and situations, and some facts not familiar to every reader. The most unpleasant feature in the book, is the doleful lamentation of the author over the evil times on which he has fallen. He has, indeed, lived somewhat beyond his time, which was that of Charles the Tenth, of pious memory, — the good old time of apostolicals and absolutists, which will not be likely to revisit France again very soon. Indeed, our unfortunate author reminds one of some weather-beaten hulk, which the tide has left high and dry on the strand, and whose signals of distress are little heeded by the rest of the convoy, which have trimmed their sails more dexterously, and sweep merrily on before the breeze. The present work affords glimpses, occasionally, of the author's happier style, which has so often fascinated us in his earlier productions. On the whole, however, it will add little to his reputation; nor, probably, much subtract from it. When a man has

sent forth a score of octavos into the world, and as good as some of M. de Chateaubriand's, he can bear up under a poor one now and then. This is not the first indifferent work laid at his door, and, as he promises to keep the field for some time longer, it will probably not be the last.

We pass over the first half of the first volume, to come to the Reformation; the point of departure, as it were, for modern civilization. Our author's views in relation to it, as we might anticipate, are not precisely those we should entertain.

“ In a religious point of view,” he says, “ the Reformation is leading insensibly to indifference, or the complete absence of faith; the reason is, that the independence of the mind terminates in two gulfs, — doubt and incredulity.

“ By a very natural reaction, the Reformation at its birth rekindled the dying flame of Catholic fanaticism. It may thus be regarded as the indirect cause of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, the disturbances of the League, the assassination of Henry the Fourth, the murders in Ireland, and of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the *dragonnades* ”! — Vol. 1. p. 193.

As to the tendency of the Reformation towards doubt and incredulity, we know that free inquiry, continually presenting new views, as the sphere of observation is enlarged, may unsettle old principles without establishing any fixed ones in their place, or, in other words, lead to skepticism. But we doubt if this happens more frequently than under the opposite system, inculcated by the Romish church, which, by precluding examination, excludes the only ground of rational belief. At all events, skepticism, in the former case, is much more remediable than in the latter; since the subject of it, by pursuing his inquiries, will, it is to be hoped, as truth is mighty, arrive, at last, at a right result; while the Romanist, inhibited from such inquiry, has no remedy. The ingenious author of “ Doblado's Letters from Spain ” has painted in the most affecting colors the state of such a mind, which, declining to take its creed at the bidding of another, is lost in a labyrinth of doubt, without a clue to guide it. As to charging on the Reformation the various enormities with which the above extract concludes, the idea is certainly new. It is, in fact, making the Protestants guilty of their own persecution, and Henry the Fourth of

his own assassination ; quite an original view of the subject, which, as far as we know, has hitherto escaped the attention of historians.

A few pages further, and we pick up the following information respecting the state of Catholicism in our own country.

“Maryland, a Catholic and very populous State, made common cause with the others, and *now most of the Western States are Catholic*. The progress of this communion in the United States of America exceeds belief. There it has been invigorated in its evangelical aliment, popular liberty, *whilst other communions decline in profound indifference*.” — Vol. I. p. 201.

We were not aware of this state of things. We did, indeed, know, that the Roman church had increased much, of late years, especially in the valley of the Mississippi. But so have other communions, as the Methodist and the Baptist, for example, the latter of which comprehends five times as many disciples as the Roman Catholic. As to the population of the latter in the West, the whole number of Catholics in the Union does not amount, probably, to three fourths of the number of inhabitants in the single western State of Ohio. The truth is, that in a country, where there is no established or favored sect, and where the clergy depend on voluntary contribution for their support, there must be constant efforts at proselytism, and a mutation of religious opinion, according to the convictions, or fancied convictions, of the converts. What one denomination gains, another loses, till roused, in its turn, by its rival, new efforts are made to retrieve its position, and the equilibrium is restored. In the mean time, the population of the whole country goes forward with giant strides, and each sect boasts, and boasts with truth, of the hourly augmentation of its numbers. Those of the Roman Catholics are swelled, moreover, by a considerable addition from emigration, many of the poor foreigners, especially the Irish, being of that persuasion. But this is no ground of triumph, as it infers no increase to the sum of Catholicism ; since what is thus gained in the New World is lost in the Old.

Our author pronounces the Reformation hostile to the arts, poetry, eloquence, elegant literature, and even the spirit of military heroism. But hear his own words.

“The Reformation, imbued with the spirit of its founder,

declared itself hostile to the arts. It sacked tombs, churches, and monuments, and made in France and England heaps of ruins." . . . . .

"The beautiful in literature will be found to exist in a greater or less degree, in proportion as writers have approximated to the genius of the Roman church." . . . . .

"If the Reformation restricted genius in poetry, eloquence, and the arts, it also checked heroism in war, for heroism is imagination in the military order." — Vol. I. pp. 194–207.

This is a sweeping denunciation; and, as far as the arts of design are intended, may probably be defended. The Romish worship, its stately ritual and gorgeous ceremonies, the throng of numbers assisting, in one form or another, at the service, all required spacious and magnificent edifices, with the rich accessories of sculpture and painting, and music also, to give full effect to the spectacle. Never was there a religion which addressed itself more directly to the senses. And, fortunately for it, the immense power and revenues of its ministers enabled them to meet its exorbitant demands. On such a splendid theatre, and under such patronage, the arts were called into life in modern Europe, and most of all in that spot, which represented the capital of Christendom. It was there, amid the pomp and luxury of religion, that those beautiful structures rose, with those exquisite creations of the chisel and the pencil, which embodied in themselves all the elements of ideal beauty.

But, independently of these external circumstances, the spirit of Catholicism was eminently favorable to the artist. Shut out from free inquiry, — from the Scriptures themselves, — and compelled to receive the dogmas of his teachers upon trust, the road to conviction lay less through the understanding, than the heart. The heart was to be moved, the affections and sympathies to be stirred, as well as the senses to be dazzled. This was the machinery, by which only could an effectual devotion to the faith be maintained in an ignorant people. It was not, therefore, Christ as a teacher, delivering lessons of practical wisdom and morality, that was brought before the eye, but Christ filling the offices of human sympathy, ministering to the poor and sorrowing, giving eyes to the blind, health to the sick, and life to the dead. It was Christ suffering under persecution, crowned with thorns, lacerated with stripes, dying on the cross.

These sorrows and sufferings were understood by the dullest soul, and told more than a thousand homilies. So with the Virgin. It was not that sainted mother of the Saviour, whom Protestants venerate, but do not worship; it was the Mother of God, and entitled, like him, to adoration. It was a woman, and as such the object of those romantic feelings, which would profane the service of the Deity, but which are not the less touching, as being in accordance with human sympathies. The respect for the Virgin, indeed, partook of that which a Catholic might feel for his tutelar saint and his mistress combined. Orders of chivalry were dedicated to her service; and her shrine was piled with more offerings, and frequented by more pilgrimages, than the altars of the Deity himself. Thus, feelings of love, adoration, and romantic honor, strangely blended, threw a halo of poetic glory, if we may so say, around their object, making it the most exalted theme for the study of the artist. What wonder, that this subject should have called forth the noblest inspirations of his genius? What wonder, that an artist, like Raphael, should have found, in the simple portraiture of a woman and a child, the materials for immortality?

It was something like a kindred state of feeling, which called into being the arts of ancient Greece, when her mythology was comparatively fresh, and faith was easy; when the legends of the past, familiar as Scripture story at a later day, gave a real existence to the beings of fancy, and the artist, embodying these in forms of visible beauty, but finished the work which the poet had begun.

The Reformation brought other trains of ideas, and with them other influences on the arts, than those of Catholicism. Indeed, its first movements were decidedly hostile, since the works of art, with which the temples were adorned, being associated with the religion itself, became odious as the symbols of idolatry. But the spirit of the Reformation gave thought a new direction, even in the cultivation of art. It was no longer sought to appeal to the senses by brilliant display, or to waken the sensibilities by those superficial emotions, which find relief in tears. A sterner, deeper feeling was roused. The mind was turned within, as it were, to ponder on the import of existence and its future destinies. For the chains were withdrawn from the soul, and it was permitted to wander at large in the regions of speculation.



Reason took the place of sentiment,—the useful of the merely ornamental. Facts were substituted for forms, even the ideal forms of beauty. There were to be no more Michael-Angelos and Raphaels, no glorious Gothic temples, which consumed generations in their building. The sublime and the beautiful were not the first objects proposed by the artist. He sought truth,—fidelity to nature. He studied the characters of his species, as well as the forms of imaginary perfection. He portrayed life, as developed in its thousand peculiarities before his own eyes; and the ideal gave way to the natural. In this way, new schools of painting, like that of Hogarth, for example, arose, which, however inferior in those great properties for which we must admire the master-pieces of Italian art, had a significance and philosophic depth, which furnished quite as much matter for study and meditation.

A similar tendency was observable in poetry, eloquence, and works of elegant literature. The influence of the Reformation here, indeed, was undoubtedly favorable, whatever it may have been on the arts. How could it be otherwise on literature, the written expression of thought, in which no grace of visible forms and proportions, no skill of mechanical execution, can cheat the eye with the vain semblance of genius? But it was not until the warm breath of the Reformation had dissolved the icy fetters which had so long held the spirit of man in bondage, that the genial current of the soul was permitted to flow; that the gates of reason were unbarred, and the mind was permitted to taste of the tree of knowledge, forbidden tree no longer. Where was the scope for eloquence, when thought was stifled in the very sanctuary of the heart? For out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh.

There might, indeed, be an elaborate attention to the outward forms of expression; an exquisite finish of verbal arrangement, the dress and garniture of thought. And, in fact, the Catholic nations have surpassed the Protestant in attention to verbal elegance and the soft music of numbers, to nice rhetorical artifice and brilliancy of composition. The poetry of Italy, and the prose of France, bear ample evidence how much time and talent have been expended on this beauty of outward form, the rich vehicle of thought. But where shall we find the powerful reasoning, various knowledge, and

fearless energy of diction, which stamp the oratory of Protestant England and America? In France, indeed, where prose has received a higher polish and classic elegance than in any other country, pulpit eloquence has reached an uncommon degree of beauty. For, though much was excluded, the avenues to the heart, as with the painter and the sculptor, were still left open to the orator. If there has been a deficiency, in this respect, in the English church, which all will not admit, it is probably that the mind, unrestricted, has been occupied with reasoning, rather than rhetoric, and sought to clear away old prejudices and establish new truths, instead of wakening a transient sensibility, or dazzling the imagination with poetic flights of eloquence. That it is the fault of the preacher, at all events, and not of Protestantism, is shown by a striking example under our own eyes, that of our distinguished countryman, Dr. Channing, whose style is irradiated with all the splendors of a glowing imagination, showing, as powerfully as any other example, probably, in English prose, of what melody and compass the language is capable, under the touch of genius instinct with genuine enthusiasm. Not that we would recommend this style, grand and beautiful as it is, for imitation. We think we have seen the ill effects of this already, in more than one instance. In fact, no style should be held up as a model for imitation. Dr. Johnson tells us, in one of those oracular passages somewhat threadbare now, that "whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." With all deference to the Doctor, who, by the formal cut of his own sentence just quoted, shows, that he did not care to follow his own prescription, we think otherwise. Whoever would write a good English style, we should say, should acquaint himself with the mysteries of the language, as revealed in the writings of the best masters, but should form his own style on nobody but himself. Every man, at least every man with a spark of originality in his composition, has his own peculiar way of thinking; and, to give it effect, it must find its way out in its own peculiar language. Indeed, it is impossible to separate language from thought, in that delicate blending of both which is called style. At least, it is impossible to produce the same effect with the original, by any copy, however literal. We may, indeed, imitate the struc-

ture of a sentence, but the ideas, which gave it its peculiar propriety, we cannot imitate. The forms of expression, that suit one man's train of thinking, no more suit another's, than one man's clothes will suit another. They will be sure to be either too big or too small, or, at all events, not to make what gentlemen of the needle call *a good fit*. If the party chances, as is generally the case, to be rather under-size, and the model is over-size, this will only expose his own littleness the more. There is no case more in point than that afforded by Dr. Johnson himself. His brilliant style has been the ambition of every school-boy, and of some children of larger growth, since the days of the Rambler. But the nearer they come to it, the worse. The beautiful is turned into the fantastic, and the sublime into the ridiculous. The most curious example of this, within our recollection, is the case of Dr. Symmons, the English editor of Milton's prose writings, and the biographer of the poet. The little Doctor has maintained, throughout his ponderous volume, a most exact imitation of the great Doctor, his sesquipedalian words, and florid rotundity of period. With all this cumbrous load of brave finery on his back, swelled to twice his original dimensions, he looks, for all the world, as he is, like a mere bag of wind, — a scarecrow, to admonish others of the folly of similar depredations.

But to return. The influence of the Reformation on elegant literature was never more visible than in the first great English school of poets, which came soon after it, at the close of the sixteenth century. The writers of that period, one and all, displayed a courage, originality, and truth, highly characteristic of the new revolution, which had been introduced by breaking down the old landmarks of opinion, and giving unbounded range to speculation and inquiry. The first great poet, Spenser, adopted the same vehicle of imagination with the Italian bards of chivalry, the romantic epic; but instead of making it, like them, a mere revel of fancy, with no further object than to delight the reader by brilliant combinations, he moralized his song, and gave it a deeper and more solemn import by the mysteries of Allegory, which, however prejudicial to its effect as a work of art, showed a mind too intent on serious thoughts and inquiries itself, to be content with the dazzling but impotent coruscations of genius, that serve no other end than that of amusement,

In the same manner, Shakspeare and the other dramatic writers of the time, instead of adopting the formal rules recognised afterwards by the French writers, their long rhetorical flourishes, their exaggerated models of character, and ideal forms, went freely and fearlessly into all the varieties of human nature, the secret depths of the soul, touching on all the diversified interests of humanity, — for he might touch on all without fear of persecution, — and thus making his productions a store-house of philosophy, of lessons of practical wisdom, deep, yet so clear, that he who runs may read.

But the spirit of the Reformation did not descend in all its fulness on the Muse, till the appearance of Milton. That great poet was, in heart, as thoroughly a reformer, and, in doctrine, much more thoroughly so, than Luther himself. Indignant at every effort to crush the spirit, and to cheat it, in his own words, “of that liberty, which rarefies and enlightens it like the influence of heaven,” he proclaimed the rights of man as a rational, immortal being, undismayed by menace and obloquy, amidst a generation of servile and unprincipled sycophants. The blindness, which excluded him from the things of earth, opened to him more glorious and spiritualized conceptions of heaven; and aided him in exhibiting the full influence of those sublime truths, which the privilege of free inquiry in religious matters had poured upon the mind. His Muse was as eminently the child of Protestantism, as that of Dante, who resembled him in so many traits of character, was of Catholicism. The latter poet, coming first among the moderns, after the fountains of the great deep, which had so long overwhelmed the world, were broken up, displayed, in his wonderful composition, all the elements of modern institutions, as distinguished from those of antiquity. He first showed the full and peculiar influence of Christianity on literature. But it was Christianity under the form of Catholicism. His subject, spiritual in its design, like Milton’s, was sustained by all the auxiliaries of a visible and material existence. His passage through the infernal abyss is a series of tragic pictures of human woe, suggesting greater refinements of cruelty than were ever imagined by a heathen poet. Amid all the various forms of mortal anguish, we look in vain for the mind as a means of torture; at least, we recall but one solitary exception to this remark. In like manner, in ascending the scale of celestial being, we

pass through a succession of brilliant *fêtes*, made up of light, music, and motion, increasing in splendor and velocity, till all are lost and confounded in the glories of the Deity. Even the pencil of the great master, dipped in these gorgeous tints of fancy, does not shrink from the attempt to portray the outlines of Deity itself. In this he aspired to what many of his countrymen in the sister arts of design have since attempted, and, like him, have failed. For who can hope to give form to the Infinite? In the same false style, Dante personifies the spirits of evil; and Satan himself is drawn in all the bugbear monstrosities of a superstitious fancy, or, more properly, age. For much was, doubtless, owing to the age, though much, also, must be referred to the genius of Catholicism, which, appealing to the senses, has a tendency to materialize the spiritual, as Protestantism, with deeper reflection, aims to spiritualize the material. Thus Milton, in treading similar ground, borrows his illustrations from intellectual sources; conveys the image of the Almighty by his attributes; and, in the frequent portraiture which he introduces of Satan, suggests only vague conceptions of form, the faint outlines of matter, as it were, stretching vast over many a rood, but towering sublime by the unconquerable energy of his will, — the fit representative of the principle of evil. Indeed, Milton has scarcely any thing of what may be called scenic decorations, to produce a certain stage effect. His actors are few, and his action nothing. It is only by their intellectual and moral relations, by giving full scope to the

“ Cherub Contemplation,  
He that soars on golden wing,  
Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,”

that he has prepared for us visions of celestial beauty and grandeur, which never fade from our souls.

In the dialogue with which the two poets have seasoned their poems, we see the action of the opposite influences we have described. Both give vent to metaphysical disquisition, of learned sound, and much greater length than the reader would desire. But in Milton it is the free discussion of a mind trained to wrestle boldly on abstrusest points of metaphysical theology; while Dante follows in the same old, barren footsteps which had been trodden by the schoolmen. Both writers were singularly bold and independent. Dante asserted that liberty which should belong to the citizen of

every free state ; that civil liberty which had been sacrificed, in his own country, by the spirit of faction. But Milton claimed a higher freedom ; a freedom of thinking and of giving utterance to thought, uncontrolled by human authority. He had fallen, indeed, on evil times. But he had a generous confidence, that his voice would reach to posterity, and would be a guide and a light to the coming generations. And truly has it proved so ; for in his writings we find the germs of many of the boasted discoveries of our own day in government and education ; so that he may be fairly considered as the morning star of that higher civilization, which distinguishes our happier era.

Milton's poetical writings do not seem, however, to have been held in that neglect by his contemporaries, which is commonly supposed. He had attracted too much attention as a political controversialist, was too much feared for his talents, as well as hated for his principles, to allow any thing which fell from his pen to pass unnoticed. He lived to see a second edition of "Paradise Lost," and this was more than was to have been fairly anticipated of a composition of this nature, however well executed, falling on such times. Indeed, its sale was no evidence that its merits were comprehended, and may be referred to the general reputation of its author. For we find so accomplished a critic as Sir William Temple, some years later, omitting the name of Milton in his roll of writers who have done honor to modern literature ; a circumstance which may, perhaps, be imputed to that reverence for the ancients, which blinded Sir William to the merits of their successors. How could Milton be understood in his own generation, — in the grovelling, sensual court of Charles the Second ? How could the dull eyes, so long fastened on the earth, endure the blaze of his inspired genius ? It was not till time had removed him to a distance, that he could be calmly gazed on, and his merits fairly contemplated. Indeed, Addison, as is well known, was the first to bring them into popular view, by a beautiful specimen of criticism, that has permanently connected his name with that of his illustrious subject. More than half a century later, another great name in English criticism, perhaps the greatest in general reputation, Johnson, passed sentence of a very different kind on the pretensions of the poet. A production more discreditable to the author is not to be found in the whole of his voluminous

works ; equally discreditable, whether regarded in an historical light, or as a sample of literary criticism. What shall we say of the biographer, who, in allusion to that affecting passage, where the blind old bard talks of himself as "in darkness, and with dangers compass round," can coolly remark, that "this darkness, had his eyes been better employed, might undoubtedly have deserved compassion" ? Or what of the critic, who can say of the most exquisite effusion of Doric minstrelsy that our language boasts, "Surely, no man could have fancied, that he read 'Lycidas' with pleasure, had he not known the author" ; and of "Paradise Lost" itself, that "its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure" ? Could a more exact measure be afforded than by this single line, of the poetic sensibility of the critic, and his unsuitableness for the office he had here assumed ? His "Life of Milton" is a humiliating testimony of the power of political and religious prejudices to warp a great and good mind from the standard of truth, in his estimation, not merely of contemporary excellence, but of the great of other years, over whose frailties Time might be supposed to have drawn his friendly mantle.

Another half century has elapsed, and ample justice has been rendered to the fame of the poet, by two elaborate criticisms, the one in the *Edinburgh Review*, from the pen of Mr. Macauley ; the other by Dr. Channing, in the "*Christian Examiner*," since republished in his own works ; remarkable performances, each in the manner highly characteristic of its author, and which have contributed, doubtless, to draw attention to the prose compositions of their subject, as the criticism of Addison did to his poetry. There is something gratifying in the circumstance, that this great advocate of intellectual liberty should have found his most able and eloquent expositor among us, whose position qualifies us, in a peculiar manner, for profiting by the rich legacy of his genius. It was but discharging a debt of gratitude.

Chateaubriand has much to say about Milton, for whose writings, both prose and poetry, notwithstanding the difference of their sentiments on almost all points of politics and religion, he appears to entertain the most sincere reverence. His criticisms are liberal and just. They show a thorough study of his author ; but neither the historical facts nor the reflections will suggest much that is new, on a subject now become trite to the English reader.

We may pass over a good deal of skimble-skamble stuff about men and things, which our author may have cut out of his commonplace-book, to come to his remarks on Sir Walter Scott, whom he does not rate so highly as most critics.

“The illustrious painter of Scotland,” he says, “seems to me to have created a false class; he has, in my opinion, confounded history and romance; the novelist has set about writing historical romances, and the historian romantic histories.” — Vol. II. p. 306.

We should have said, on the contrary, that he had improved the character of both; that he had given new value to romance, by building it on history, and new charms to history, by embellishing it with the graces of romance.

To be more explicit. The principal historical work of Scott is the “Life of Napoleon.” It has doubtless many of the faults incident to a dashing style of composition, which precluded the possibility of compression and arrangement in the best form of which the subject was capable. This, in the end, may be fatal to the perpetuity of the work; for posterity will be much less patient than our own age. He will have a much heavier load to carry, inasmuch as he is to bear up under all of his own time, and ours too. It is very certain, then, some must go by the board; and nine sturdy volumes, which is the amount of Sir Walter’s English edition, will be somewhat alarming. Had he confined himself to half the quantity, there would have been no ground for distrust. Every day, nay hour, we see, ay, and feel, the ill effects of this rapid style of composition, so usual with the best writers of our day. The immediate profits which such writers are pretty sure to get, notwithstanding the example of M. Chateaubriand, operate like the dressing improvidently laid on a naturally good soil, forcing out noxious weeds in such luxuriance, as to check, if not absolutely to kill, the more healthful vegetation. Quantities of trivial detail find their way into the page, mixed up with graver matters. Instead of that skilful preparation, by which all the avenues can verge at last to one point, so as to leave a distinct impression, an impression of unity, on the reader, he is hurried along zig-zag, in a thousand directions, or round and round, but never, in the cant of the times, “going ahead” an inch. He leaves off pretty much where he set out, except that his memory may be tolerably



well stuffed with facts, which, from want of some principle of cohesion, will soon drop out of it. He will find himself like a traveller, who has been riding through a fine country, it may be, by moonlight, getting glimpses of every thing, but no complete, well-illuminated view of the whole (“*quale per incertam lunam*” &c.) ; or rather, like the same traveller, whizzing along in a locomotive so rapidly, as to get even a glimpse fairly of nothing, instead of making his tour in such a manner as would enable him to pause at what was worth his attention, to pass by night over the barren and uninteresting, and occasionally to rise to such elevations as would afford the best points of view for commanding the various prospect.

The romance-writer labors under no such embarrassments. He may, indeed, precipitate his work, so that it may lack proportion, and the nice arrangement required by the rules, which, fifty years ago, would have condemned it as a work of art. But the criticism of the present day is not so squeamish, or, to say truth, pedantic. It is enough for the writer of fiction, if he give pleasure ; and this, everybody knows, is not effected by the strict observance of artificial rules. It is of little consequence how the plot is snarled up, or whether it be untied or cut, in order to extricate the *dramatis personæ*. At least, it is of little consequence, compared with the true delineation of character. The story is serviceable only as it affords a means for the display of this ; and if the novelist but keeps up the interest of his story and the truth of his characters, we easily forgive any dislocations which his light vehicle may encounter from too heedless motion. Indeed, rapidity of motion may in some sort favor him, keeping up the glow of his invention, and striking out, as he dashes along, sparks of wit and fancy, that give a brilliant illumination to his track. But in history there must be another kind of process ; a process at once slow and laborious. Old parchments are to be ransacked, charters and musty records to be deciphered, and stupid, worm-eaten chroniclers, who had much more of passion, frequently, to blind, than good sense to guide them, must be sifted and compared. In short, a sort of Medea-like process is to be gone through, and many an old bone is to be boiled over in the caldron, before it can come out again clothed in the elements of beauty. The dreams of the novelist, — the poet of prose,

— on the other hand, are beyond the reach of art ; and the magician calls up the most brilliant forms of fancy by a single stroke of his wand.

Scott, in his *History*, was relieved, in some degree, from this necessity of studious research, by borrowing his theme from contemporary events. It was his duty, indeed, to examine evidence carefully, and sift out contradictions and errors. This demanded shrewdness and caution, but not much previous preparation and study. It demanded, above all, candor ; for it was his business, not to make out a case for a client, but to weigh both sides, like an impartial judge, before summing up the evidence, and delivering his conscientious opinion. We believe there is no good ground for charging Scott with having swerved from this part of his duty. Those, indeed, who expected to see him deify his hero, and raise altars to his memory, were disappointed ; and so were those also, who demanded, that the tail and cloven hoof should be made to peep out beneath the imperial robe. But this proves his impartiality. It would be unfair, however, to require the degree of impartiality which is to be expected from one removed to a distance from the theatre of strife, from those national interests and feelings, which are so often the disturbing causes of historic fairness. An American, no doubt, would have been, in this respect, in a more favorable point of view for contemplating the European drama. The ocean, stretched between us and the Old World, has the effect of time, and extinguishes, or, at least, cools, the hot and angry feelings, which find their way into every man's bosom within the atmosphere of the contest. Scott was a Briton, with all the peculiarities of one, — at least, of a North Briton ; and the future historian, who gathers materials from his labors, will throw these national predilections into the scale in determining the probable accuracy of his statements. These are not greater, however, than might occur to any man, and allowance will always be made for them, on the ground of a general presumption ; so that a greater degree of impartiality, indeed, by leading to false conclusions in this respect, would scarcely have served the cause of truth better with posterity. An individual, who felt his reputation compromised, may have made fight, indeed, on this or that charge of inaccuracy. But no such charge has come from any of the leading journals in the country, which, however, would

not have been slow to expose it, and which would not, considering the great popularity, and, consequently, influence of the work, have omitted, as they did, to notice it at all, had it afforded any obvious ground of exception on this score. Where, then, is the romance, which our author accuses Sir Walter of blending with history ?

He did, indeed, possess the power of giving a sort of dramatic interest to every thing he handled, whether true or fictitious, by his faithful portraiture of character, and his lively delineations of events. We shall look in vain, among the multitudinous records of the French Revolution, for a more exact, as well as comprehensive, view of its strange, checkered transactions and complicated causes. What a contrast does it present to that harlequin compound, which passes under the name of History, by Carlyle ; in which the author flounders on, amid a sort of "crude consistence," half prose, half poetry, like Milton's Devil, working his way through Chaos,

"A boggy Syrtis, neither sea  
Nor good dry land."

Scott had too masculine a spirit to condescend to such affectations ; and too sound a taste, to attempt to produce effect by overcoloring what Nature may be said to have colored too highly before. He knew that a simple statement of the extraordinary events of the time, was all that was demanded for effect.

Scott was, in truth, master of the picturesque. He understood, better than any historian since the time of Livy, how to dispose his lights and shades so as to produce the most striking result. This property of romance he had a right to borrow. This talent is particularly observable in the animated parts of his story, — in his battles, for example. No man ever painted those terrible scenes with greater effect. He had a natural relish for gunpowder ; and his mettle roused, like that of the war-horse, at the sound of the trumpet. His acquaintance with military science enabled him to employ a technical phraseology, just technical enough to give a knowing air to his descriptions, without embarrassing the reader by a pedantic display of unintelligible jargon. This is a talent rare in a civilian. Nothing can be finer than many of his battle-pieces in his "Life of Bonaparte," unless, indeed, we except one or two in his "History of Scotland" ; as

the fight of Bannockburn, for example, in which Burns's "Scots, wha hae" seems to breathe in every line.

It is when treading on Scottish ground, that he seems to feel all his strength. "I seem always to step more firmly," he said to some one, "when on my own native heather." His mind was steeped in Scottish lore, and his bosom warmed with a sympathetic glow for the age of chivalry. Accordingly his delineations of this period, whether in history or romance, are unrivalled; as superior in effect to those of most compilers, as the richly-stained glass of the feudal ages is superior in beauty and brilliancy of tints to a modern imitation. If this be borrowing something from romance, it is, we repeat, no more than what is lawful for the historian, and explains the meaning of our assertion, that he has improved history by the embellishments of fiction.

Yet, after all, how wide the difference between the province of history and of romance, under Scott's own hands, may be shown by comparing his account of Mary's reign in his "History of Scotland," with the same period in the novel of "The Abbot." The historian must keep the beaten track of events. The novelist launches into the illimitable regions of fiction, provided only that his historic portraits be true to their originals. By due attention to this, fiction is made to minister to history, and may, in point of fact, contain as much real truth, — truth of character, though not of situation. "The difference between the historian and me," says Fielding, "is, that with him every thing is false but the names and dates; while with me nothing is false but these." There is at least as much truth in this as in most witticisms.

It is the great glory of Scott, that, by nice attention to costume and character in his novels, he has raised them to historic importance, without impairing their interest as works of art. Who now would imagine, that he could form any thing like a satisfactory notion of the golden days of Queen Bess, that had not read "Kenilworth"? or of Richard Cœur-de-Lion and his brave paladins, that had not read "Ivanhoe"? Why, then, it has been said, not at once incorporate into regular history all these traits, which give such historical value to the novel? Because, in this way, the strict truth, which history requires, would be violated. This cannot be. The fact is, History and Romance are too near

akin, ever to be lawfully united. By mingling them together, a confusion is produced, like the mingling of day and night, mystifying and distorting every feature of the landscape. It is enough for the novelist, if he be true to the spirit; the historian must be true, also, to the letter. He cannot coin pertinent remarks and anecdotes to illustrate the characters of his drama. He cannot even provide them with suitable costumes. He must take just what Father Time has given him, just what he finds in the records of the age, setting down neither more nor less. Now, the dull chroniclers of the old time rarely thought of putting down the smart sayings of the great people they biographize; still less of entering into minute circumstances of personal interest. These were too familiar to contemporaries to require it; and, therefore, they waste their breath on more solemn matters of state, all-important in their generation, but not worth a rush in the present. What would the historian not give, could he borrow those fine touches of nature, with which the novelist illustrates the characters of his actors, — natural touches, indeed, but in truth just as artificial as any other part, — all coined in the imagination of the writer. There is the same difference between his trade and that of the novelist, that there is between the historical and the portrait painter. The former necessarily takes some great subject, with great personages, all strutting about in gorgeous state attire, and air of solemn tragedy; while his brother artist insinuates himself into the family groups, and picks out natural, familiar scenes and faces, laughing or weeping, but in the charming undress of nature. What wonder that novel-reading should be so much more amusing than history?

But we have already trespassed too freely on the patience of our readers, who will think the rambling spirit of our author contagious. Before dismissing him, however, we will give a taste of his quality, by one or two extracts, not very germane to English literature, but about as much so as a great part of the work. The first is a poetical sally on Bonaparte's burial-place, quite in Monsieur Chateaubriand's peculiar vein.

“The solitude of Napoleon, in his exile and his tomb, has thrown another kind of spell over a brilliant memory. Alexander did not die in sight of Greece; he disappeared amid the pomp of distant Babylon. Bonaparte did not close his eyes in the presence of France; he passed away in the gorgeous hori-

zon of the torrid zone. The man, who had shown himself in such powerful reality, vanished like a dream ; his life, which belonged to history, coöperated in the poetry of his death. He now sleeps for ever, like a hermit or a paria, beneath a willow, in a narrow valley, surrounded by steep rocks, at the extremity of a lonely path. The depth of the silence, which presses upon him, can only be compared to the vastness of that tumult which had surrounded him. Nations are absent ; their throng has retired. The bird of the tropics, harnessed to the car of the sun, as Buffon magnificently expresses it, speeding his flight downwards from the planet of light, rests alone, for a moment, over the ashes, the weight of which has shaken the equilibrium of the globe.

“ Bonaparte crossed the ocean, to repair to his final exile, regardless of that beautiful sky which delighted Columbus, Vasco de Gama, and Camoëns. Stretched upon the ship's stern, he perceived not that unknown constellations were sparkling over his head. His powerful glance, for the first time, encountered their rays. What to him were stars which he had never seen from his bivouacs, and which had never shone over his empire ? Nevertheless, not one of them has failed to fulfil its destiny ; one half of the firmament spread its light over his cradle ; the other half was reserved to illuminate his tomb.”— Vol. II. pp. 185, 186.

The next extract relates to the British statesman, William Pitt.

“ Pitt, tall and slender, had an air at once melancholy and sarcastic. His delivery was cold, his intonation monotonous, his action scarcely perceptible ; at the same time the lucidness and the fluency of his thoughts, the logic of his arguments, suddenly irradiated with flashes of eloquence, rendered his talent something above the ordinary line.

“ I frequently saw Pitt walking across St. James's Park, from his own house to the palace. On his part, George the Third arrived from Windsor, after drinking beer out of a pewter pot with the farmers of the neighbourhood ; he drove through the mean courts of his mean habitation in a grey chariot, followed by a few of the horse-guards. This was the master of the kings of Europe, as five or six merchants of the city are the masters of India. Pitt, dressed in black, with a steel-hilted sword by his side, and his hat under his arm, ascended, taking two or three steps at a time. In his passage he only met with three or four emigrants who had nothing to do ; casting on us a disdainful look, he turned up his nose and his pale face, and passed on.

“ At home, this great financier kept no sort of order ; he had no regular hours for his meals, or for sleep. Over head and ears in debt, he paid nobody, and never could take the trouble to cast up a bill. A *valet-de-chambre* managed his house. Ill dressed, without pleasure, without passion, greedy of power, he despised honors, and would not be any thing more than William Pitt.

“ In the month of June, 1822, Lord Liverpool took me to dine at his country-house. As we crossed Putney-Heath, he showed me the small house, where the son of Lord Chatham, the statesman who had had Europe in his pay, and distributed with his own hand all the treasures of the world, died in poverty.”— Vol. II. pp. 277, 278.

The following extracts show the changes that have taken place in English manners and society, and may afford the “ whiskered pandour ” of our own day an opportunity of contrasting his style of dandyism with that of the preceding generation.

“ Separated from the continent by a long war, the English retained their manners and their national character till the end of the last century. All was not yet machine in the working classes, — folly in the upper classes. On the same pavements, where you now meet squalid figures, and men in frock coats, you were passed by young girls with white tippets, straw hats tied under the chin with a riband, with a basket on the arm, in which was fruit or a book ; all kept their eyes cast down, all blushed when one looked at them. Frock coats, without any other, were so unusual in London, in 1793, that a woman, deploring with tears the death of Louis the Sixteenth, said to me, ‘ But, my dear Sir, is it true, that the poor king was dressed in a frock coat when they cut off his head ? ’

“ The gentlemen-farmers had not yet sold their patrimony to take up their residence in London ; they still formed, in the House of Commons, that independent fraction, which, transferring their support from the opposition to the ministerial side, upheld the ideas of order and propriety. They hunted the fox and shot pheasants in autumn, ate fat goose at Michaelmas, greeted the sirloin with shouts of ‘ Roast beef for ever ! ’ complained of the present, extolled the past, cursed Pitt and the war, which doubled the price of port wine, and went to bed drunk, to begin the same life again on the following day. They felt quite sure, that the glory of Great Britain would not perish, so long as ‘ God save the king ’ was sung, the rotten boroughs maintained, the game-laws enforced, and hares and partridges could be sold by stealth, at market, under the names of lions and ostriches.”— Vol. II. pp. 279, 280.

“ In 1822, at the time of my embassy to London, the fashionable was expected to exhibit, at the first glance, an unhappy and unhealthy man ; to have an air of negligence about his person, long nails, a beard neither entire nor shaven, but as if grown for a moment unawares, and forgotten during the preoccupations of wretchedness ; hair in disorder ; a sublime, mild, wicked eye ; lips compressed in disdain of human nature ; a Byronian heart, overwhelmed with weariness and disgust of life.

“ The dandy of the present day must have a conquering, frivolous, insolent look. He must pay particular attention to his toilet, wear mustaches, or a beard trimmed into a circle, like Queen Elizabeth’s ruff, or like the radiant disk of the sun. He shows the proud independence of his character by keeping his hat upon his head, by lolling upon sofas, by thrusting his boots into the faces of the ladies, seated in admiration upon chairs before him. He rides with a cane, which he carries like a taper, regardless of the horse, which he bestrides, as it were, by accident. His health must be perfect, and he must always have five or six felicities upon his hands. Some radical dandies, who have advanced the furthest towards the future, have a pipe. But, no doubt, all this has changed, even during the time that I have taken to describe it.”—Vol. II. pp. 303, 304.

The avowed purpose of the present work, singular as it may seem from the above extracts, is, to serve as an introduction to a meditated translation of Milton into French, since wholly, or in part, completed by M. Chateaubriand, who thinks, truly enough, that Milton’s “ political ideas make him a man of our own epoch.” When an exile in England, in his early life, during the troubles of the Revolution, our author picked up a subsistence by translating some of Milton’s verses ; and he now proposes to render the bard and himself the same kind office by a version on a more extended scale. Thus, he concludes ; “ I again seat myself at the table of my poet. He will have nourished me in my youth, and my old age. It is nobler and safer to have recourse to glory than to power.” Our author’s situation is an indifferent commentary on the value of literary fame,—at least, on its pecuniary value. No man has had more of it in his day. No man has been more alert to make the most of it, by frequent, reiterated appearance before the public,—whether in full dress or dishabille,—yet always before them ; and now, in the decline of life, we find him obtaining a



scanty support by "French translation and Italian song." We heartily hope, that the bard of "Paradise Lost" will do better for his translator than he did for himself, and that M. de Chateaubriand will put more than five pounds in his pocket by his literary labor.

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ART. III. — *The Poems of RICHARD MONCKTON MILNES*, Author of "Memorials of a Tour in Greece." In Two Volumes. London: Edward Moxon. 1838. 8vo. pp. xvi. 208 and xii. 166.

THE external appearance of these volumes is attractive beyond the usual splendor of the London press, and indicates their connexion with the delicacies of English high life. The author everywhere makes known, in prefaces, dedications, and verses, his aristocratic standing; and, as might be expected, his works receive not a little of their character and coloring from this circumstance. Many of the pieces are connected with his own personal history, or that of his family and friends; many are suggested by scenes in his own and foreign lands; and some have that ambiguous air of half-real, half-fictitious, which renders it doubtful to the reader, whether they have any true meaning or not. Being mostly occasional, there is none of any considerable length. The first volume bears the title, "Poems of Many Years"; the second, that of "Memorials of a Residence on the Continent, and Historical Poems."

Among the latter no small number seem to have been written in imitation of Wordsworth's historical pieces, and, like many of them, are merely rhymed prose. It is surprising, that men can go on writing sonnets *à-propos* to every thing, with a fancy, that, because there are fourteen lines strung together by rule, therefore there is poetry. Others of these pieces have a good deal of sweetness and grace, marked by a love of nature, an affectionate sympathy with suffering, and a devotedness to friends and kindred, which are altogether amiable and winning. They give the feeling, that the author is a man of great gentlemanliness of character, of a contemplative turn of mind, elegant in his